**What Shoulder & What Art, Could Twist the Sinews of thy Heart**

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# What Shoulder & What Art, Could Twist the Sinews of thy Heart

by bysexualthorin

Summary

"The plan was as follows: Will would contact the dragon, influencing him to meet his idol Hannibal, and arrange an assault on the hospital. Alana and Margot, their son and all the queens' men would fly away to some undisclosed location for deniability and self-preservation. A large portion of the inmates would be transferred to another hospital nearby on claims of "unpredictable gas leaks" that threatened the lives of everyone inside the building, Hannibal included. This served as both the cause of Alana's temporary escape, as inspectors, yellow tape, and legality issues would soon follow her threatening HIPAA and psychiatric licensure violations, amongst many, and the dragon's opportunity to strike. The dragon would then breach the hospital, intending to meet and/or kill Hannibal, wherein the FBI would come storming after to apprehend one, both, or neither, depending on the body count."

Or, the one where Will Graham is a little dark (which is practically canon, right?) and self-deprecating and in love with Hannibal, and it only takes three years living in Vermont to realize it. This is an alternate version of the escape, where Molly and Wally don't exist, and Will takes matters into his own hands.

Notes

This is my first shot at fanfic for the Hannibal fandom, so go easy on me! I've fallen hopelessly in love with this show and this ship, so you can expect more from me in the future if you like this. Also, I may make a sequel just for the smut? Let me know if you wanna see that in the comments.

Also, I have no idea if Will's cabin was actually in Vermont or not, I just made that part up because Will Graham being his own brand of serial killer on the East Coast after Hannibal is locked up is really pleasing to me for some reason.

(Also, Will Graham is secretly a fan of BBC's Sherlock, if you know where to find it.)

Can we also address the elephant in the room: wtf were those holes in the glass of Hannibal's room? I assumed they were there to hear one another through the glass, but there's also the telephone so... what's up with that?

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Rural Vermont was not so different from Wolf Trap, Virginia in the eyes of Will Graham. The tree line and wide-open expanses of land held secrets and empty promises every morning, just before the sun revealed itself to the world. The birds still chirped echoes of blood-curdling screams from (his, Hannibal's their) past victims across the fields. The ebb and flow of time had complicated an abstract concept such as guilt or blame, every dead body lying on Will's conscience just as lightly as it had Hannibal's.

The red stain of power still smeared across the white snowbanks like one long, masterful brushstroke across canvas. There was the same bite in the frosted air that reminded him of its opposite—of hot nights in Italy when his heart beat itself out of his chest and onto the skeleton's floor of the Norman Chapel, eternally suspended by age-old swords that pierced every lovesick chamber left beating; it had been beautiful, and aching, and full of thorny darkness that Will knew all too well in both their minds.

He'd traded his old dilapidated barn for a roomy shack, filled with tools and extra bedding for the ever-growing dog pack that invaded his new home. He had to shovel the pathway from the basement door of the log cabin to the shack every few days, maybe every week if the weather allowed, and it allowed him the time to wipe his mind clear and clean of any lingering bitterness about the past. His routine became worship, losing himself to the rhythmic motions of shoveling tons of snow and recalling the sensation of lugging Randall Tier's body across his lawn to dismantle him, break him down into sensible pieces that he elevated to art in a museum.

Vermont gave him the quiet and the space to air out the darkest rooms in his memory palace. Some proved more difficult than others, years of dust and decay lay thick like oil paint across the rooms and the windows had long been boarded up to shield the light of the sun. Despite the overabundance of tools in his shack, nothing could pry the old boards loose to let the light in. Eventually, he settled for repainting the walls a bright white, a lingering chuckle of purity and temptation to ruin something so perfect rolling over the plaster, lighting the rooms in small swathes of torchlight for brief periods of time. Other rooms were brighter, filled with old memories and exchanged words that left behind little-to-no destruction in their wake, but Will found himself harboring the dilapidated torch-lit rooms more so than any other. He lost himself to those rooms, found himself in the corners that nestled a soft remembrance of a European accent and finely fitted three-piece suits, rocking back and forth against the meeting of the walls as if they could envelope him with psychoanalytic and surgical precision.

He walked across the recently shoveled path, prying the door open for the wave of dog fur and panting breaths to trail in before him, finding the shelf littered with cans of Ol'Roy that

read “beef roast” and “bacon cheeseburger” on the sides. He pried the lids open by their pull tabs, felt a brief allusion to quiet and controlled power after snapping Randall’s hip joint like a wishbone over a candlelit dinner, and scraped the chunky brown slop into awaiting bowls on the wood floor. After hand signaling their command to eat, the dogs launching themselves toward the feast that awaited salivating jowls, he collected the empty tin cans that he’d placed atop one of the two deep chest freezers along the back wall and disposed of them outside in an old burn barrel he’d recycled as a trash can.

As the dogs ate their breakfast, the sun pressing against the tops of the pines for intimate details and memories, he threw the lid to the freezer up, inspecting the frozen slabs of venison in one corner and setting a medium cut out to thaw high and out of reach for even the most overzealous dogs. His eyes lingered on the primed thigh beside the stack, the loin precut into smaller portions beside it, and finally on the set of bright pink lungs near the very bottom.

He imagined cutting into it a week or so from now, picking out meat rubs and seasonings that would complement the rich savory flavor, and settling on a cabernet sauvignon that bit back against every sliver of meat. Will would fantasize precious moments with each piece, closing his eyes and returning to an impressive and dark cherry dining table that once seated himself and Hannibal, feeling the tiny gasps of air from the 22-year-old local librarian hit his throat as she slept on, peaceful and languid like water, before he cut into sternum.

The meat was not bitter about being eaten, none of it was, and it tasted all the better for it; he’d learned that over the years. His seclusion left him ample opportunity to reframe and practice the lessons Hannibal had taught him from a previous life. He would treat himself to this communion in the coming days, awaiting the confirmation of the insanity plea that befell *Il Mostro* back in Maryland.

Will would toast the empty plate setting across from him, alone in his cabin despite the encroaching army of four-legged friends by his door that stretched out to nap along the warm boards of the cabin. A strong flame stoked itself in the fireplace behind nearby. He would gaze long enough at the scuffed utensils, flower engravings curled along each handle, until he heard them sing from close contact with each other, heard the sound of two half-full wine glasses clink together in an unspoken promise, solidifying the world swirling around him as he held onto the unblinking gaze of Hannibal Lecter before taking his first bite. They would continue to see the best in each other in spite of the worst, forever circling the drain of their identical psyche to reach new opportunities and depths.

He did not have to imagine the unforgettable twitch of his lips, akin to a chuckle for the reserved nature of the good doctor, for it had always lived across from him, amused and eager with everything Will had ever asked of him or done on his behalf.

He wondered what Hannibal would ask of him now, what he would give him without a word.

The chest freezer shut with a quiet determination, clapping the thick shroud of silence that had seeped into his being. He would prepare a dinner party for two.

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Will had known deep down in his heart, the minute his last words of goodbye escaped his lips to reach Hannibal, that he had made the wrong move. He watched, internally screaming himself hoarse, wanting to take back every word and flee the country. They were Even-Steven, toe-to-toe, and growing weary of fighting each other when their own identities had melded into one. He couldn't. He wasn't ready to give in, to completely immerse himself in this life. He wasn't who Hannibal wanted him to be and pretending otherwise would only sour what had grown between them.

*We are a zero-sum game.*

He could only watch, desperate for an act of God or divine intervention on either of their parts, as the older man nearly choked with emotion. The normally placid, neutral, even alien expression that donned his face was long gone, the deep crevices of his eyes sinking in and a teary gleam pinning him down against the bed with grappling acceptance. He was rejecting Hannibal, rejecting his gifts and who he was, all over again, but not out of indecision or doubt like before. *Will wasn't good enough for him*, and if it took a serrated and abrupt separation to salvage what Hannibal had so carefully created for them, so be it.

Watching Hannibal turn to leave his house in Wolf Trap nearly destroyed him. It felt as if the very molecules of his being, the very thought of independence and division, were setting alight a fire he would never be able to extinguish. The battering sound of the screen door contracting back on its spring, returning to its frame, slapped him out of the inferno.

*See me. See me. See me.*

He had lingered in his bed the entire evening, deadened to the world outside at the thought of being severed from Hannibal once and for all. His heart beat itself into his throat, desperate and hopeful in the weakest way that the man was just around the corner. Hannibal had, in some ways, seen him, as he secretly hoped, as they held a second of fragile time between them in the night, Hannibal turning himself in so Will could *always find him when he needed.* He had lingered nearby, for what Will couldn't fathom, but their connection had remained despite their best efforts to split. They were entirely codependent on each other, unable to live with and without the other.

After the black SUVs left in a parade shuffle, Hannibal loaded in the back of Jack's vehicle, Will sat on the kitchen floor for what felt like an eternity. The house creaked and breathed around him, a death rattle of life choking its way out before being utterly spent, collapsing under the tension and settling into a deadening silence that wracked his brain more than encephalitis ever did.

He couldn't stay here, couldn't live in a space that had held him together in the wake of Hannibal's prolonged and intimate exposure. That's what Will felt like—an overused and spent nerve ending, raw and open to the brutality of the world around him. He could no longer live in the emptiest room of his memory palace.

Alana had tried to stop him from selling the house—a last-ditch effort on her part to tap into old emotions of who they both used to be—to preserve some semblance of normalcy in a post-apocalyptic world. Hannibal's identity reveal and capture was the closest thing Will would likely ever associate with rapture, feeling his own freedom and sanity be cuffed and shoved into the back of the car with him. He didn't even bother to answer her, merely hanging up and immediately putting her number on the "blocked callers" list inside his phone.

Will was not the man she thought he was, even through it all. She still held a penchant for sympathy toward him, falling back to consider the shaking, twitchy version of himself he once lived in before he was exposed to pure power. She was not stupid, but her penchant for him was her ultimate weakness. He would use that to his advantage. Not now, not soon, but one day, when the pieces fell where they may and everyone walking the Earth post-rapture had assumed Will was walking right alongside them—that he wasn't above the clouds, bathing in the blood red sky of dusk chasing after Hannibal's artistry, his poetry, his love.

Will wasn't the man Hannibal believed he was, not yet, though he was close enough to Become in his own time. It would be slower, more painful and less graceful than any method Hannibal may have used on him, but he would shake off his own human suits until he became the Will Graham he had always meant to be—who Hannibal saw him as.

Will would become the man Hannibal always saw him as.

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The Tooth Fairy provided him with an opportunity.

He knew the second that he read the newspaper's article detailing the second family's slaughter that Jack was already calculating the costs of lassoing Will back onto the frontlines. Jack had no such penchant for Will's well-being like Alana, however, and so the spitting exhaust of the black SUV soon dripped across the untouched snow of his steep driveway as it cruised across like a hearse foreboding a tragedy of threes: the victims of the Tooth Fairy, the desecration of Will's ill-won peace and retirement, and the ugly fallout that surely proceeded the case's close. When it came to Will, murder, and Hannibal, because the three were never mutually exclusive in Jack's experience, it was always wise to consider the upcoming case to be the last, one way or another.

He hadn't let Jack in. He hadn't for quite some time, ignoring his calls and his words even before Hannibal had sacrificed himself for Will. He'd been the shadow that trailed him to Europe, a step behind Will and Hannibal's excursions, only skimming the cliff notes of their affair and reconstructing a version of it for himself to understand. If Hannibal and Will were an ancient cathedral, Jack was a wrecking-ball threatening to rebuild them if it attended to his "agenda," worshippers be damned.

There was a careful balance of artlessness and composure in Jack that made sense of him for Will—helped him rationalize why he was still here, alive a breathing, despite Hannibal's wrath. He had scraped by the skin of his teeth, but that didn't mean he was privy to see either of them from here onward.

The printed pictures that laid on his porch table stared at him long after Jack left. The newspaper had gotten the details mostly right, though they didn't paint the picture; journalism had a funny way of teetering along the lines of the truth, a portion of the truth, and nothing but their own imaginings of the truth whenever possible. Articles never achieved a level of fresco that Will craved, instead outlining key prominent land markings and allowing him to color in the white space left behind.

They'd done the same sketchings for his own work since he'd arrived in Vermont, never achieving a clarity of *why* he killed, barely grasping *how* and completely ignoring a deep dive into motive. He supposed they couldn't find one, as he had appeared as untraceable and removed as Hannibal ever had, fleeting from person to person when it suited his curiosity. He had killed a mechanic for the thrill of it, because he wanted to see how long it took for local P.D. to find him strung on his own tow's hitch, and because he wanted to feel it again—the quiet power and control that ran through his and Hannibal's veins, the stimulation of the mind to completely relish in the taking of a life, but Will's method had everything to do with empathy.

Hannibal had killed for convenience, for whimsy, and to appease his won moral standards of manners and propriety. He killed for Will's education, to burn the wool from his eyes to see the truth lurking under the surface. Will killed for immersion, for complete and pure emotion, to understand the point of view of life transitioning into death. It was art for both of them, in their own way, full of consumption and a greed for understanding and companionship that they found in one another. They were artists inhabiting a landfill of abandoned canvases, attempting to bring light and clarity to a world full of sacrilegious duplications in favor or true originality.

The Tooth Fairy was certainly a painter in his own right. The minute details of his crimes had sold him when he'd perused the case weeks before Jack's arrival: using the glass-cutter to maintain an elegance and stealth to the act, eliminating the pets to provide a sense of safety for himself while also destabilizing the dynamic of the family—creating advantages from scratch. He was an improviser, backed by careful planning but allowing himself to hunt attune to his surroundings, allowing organic and divine influence to sway the frame-by-frame details that would shape his overall design.

The shy boy had potential, though his mind seemed at odds with itself. He was fighting an unnecessary war within himself, much like Will had; it was the stray hair in his brushstrokes that ruined the painting. Will was in Baltimore within the day, texting Jack that he was close enough to Quantico only to be forwarded a predetermined schedule of the week with autopsy

reviews, profiling sessions, and paperwork amidst research. He needed to consume the Tooth Fairy to understand him, one document and splatter of blood at a time.

Jack seemed to understand on some level that Will was in this for more than just taking down the latest murderer, likely because of his quick acceptance, following up with an inquiry of his own.

*Do you think you'll need assistance?*

His mind flashed to his memory palace, navigating himself toward the carefully neutral construction of Hannibal's cage that trickled like an ever-flowing stream between his psychiatric office, his study from home, and an unfamiliar and sterile cell not dissimilar to Abel Gideon's.

*No. If you want it, you can ask for it yourself.*

His plan relied on the absence of Hannibal's influence for once, and Jack's inability to distinguish them as individual forces despite all evidence to the contrary was only slightly infringing on that principle.

*And if I want, and he refuses to work with me, what then?*

*Jesus Christ, Jack*, he thought, palming his aching and tired face before firing back a biting retort he didn't bother to proofread before hitting "send." If he was to do this, and do it well like he wanted to, coming into contact with Hannibal in any capacity would surely thwart his preparations, even if it was Jack merely name-dropping him and his close proximity to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. *It only takes one shift to start an avalanche*, he thought, and Hannibal's obsession with him would be closer to a ton of dynamite imploding on the snowy cliff faces of his plan.

Hannibal had a way of making the most minor adjustments coalesce into chaos, and Will wasn't sure if he could outmaneuver him in time to accomplish all that he set out to do without gaining more attention than he planned. He would break Hannibal out, rescue him, see him once again, and he didn't need or want any assistance on the good doctor's part to

accomplish that goal. It was part pride, part practicality, and entirely performative; he wanted Hannibal to see in him the man he'd always encouraged him to be, uninfluenced by the desires of anyone, even Hannibal himself.

Praying that Jack had lost even a smidge of ambition during Will's retirement was tantamount to expecting Hannibal to not dip his tendrils of influence into Will's plans, if for little else than entertainment value. He could escape right now, at this very moment, Will was sure, if he'd wanted to. *But he didn't*, his mind whispered back, *because he wants you to see him.*

*Goddamn it*. This was going to be much messier than he designed.

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Hannibal knew he was in town because *of fucking course he did*. Jack had let the beans spill, which had set a domino effect in motion that he was barely able to contain, leading to him playing catch-up and barely managing to contain his frustration when watching Dr. Chilton get his face ravaged by The Artist Formerly Known As The Tooth Fairy, now donning himself the grandiose and self-gratifying title of The Great Red Dragon.

Will had to roll his eyes the first time he'd heard that because, really, William Blake? He wasn't opposed to the poet by any means, but it seemed underwhelming in the afterglow of Hannibal's brilliance from years past. He supposed he was used to a "better class of criminal," thinking back to a television program he'd often played in the silence of his cabin.

As he'd reviewed the video, the ransom-gone-wrong, a steady mantra of *"On what wings dare he aspire? / What the hand, dare seize the fire?"* seized his mind as he stared at the obtuse and disproportionate back tattoo. "The Tyger" suited him much more, he thought, but he kept his own opinions of British Romanticism poetry and body art to himself when he was around Jack and Alana. He made a mental note to track down any tattoo artists within the area he suspected the dragon lived, finding a connection to art styles or overconfident personalities that could lead to the killer's identity.

They needed to trap the dragon and fast. Well, *he* needed to. The FBI could stay well and clear out of it for all he cared, as it made the process a lot smoother and more enjoyable for him in the long run. He hadn't wanted to dupe the ghosts of his past, but Jack and Alana waited on bated breath for him to suggest the very fate they'd all been avoiding for different reasons: setting Hannibal free.

He nearly gave in, suggesting the very idea of it, but he swerved last minute, adopting some of the dragon's improvisation and eagerness for his own advantage. He would track down the dragon, meet him, and begin to plant his own seeds in this case. If the plan that emerged from the chrysalis involved frightening Alana or making a fool of Jack, Will wouldn't lose an ounce of sleep over it. They both had attempted to stunt his growth in the past, impeding on Hannibal's design for him that took excruciatingly long to complete.

His Becoming would not be overshadowed by the attention-seeking dragon, come Hell or high water.

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The plan was as follows: Will would contact the dragon, influencing him to meet his idol Hannibal, and arrange an assault on the hospital. Alana and Margot, their son and all the queens' men would fly away to some undisclosed location for deniability and self-preservation. A large portion of the inmates would be transferred to another hospital nearby on claims of "unpredictable gas leaks" that threatened the lives of everyone inside the building, Hannibal included. This served as both the cause of Alana's temporary escape, as inspectors, yellow tape, and legality issues would soon follow her threatening HIPAA and psychiatric licensure violations, amongst many, and the dragon's opportunity to strike. The dragon would then breach the hospital, intending to meet and/or kill Hannibal, wherein the FBI would come storming after to apprehend one, both, or neither, depending on the body count.

At least, that was the plan Will disclosed to Alana and the FBI. His own plan, which the dragon (or Dolarhyde, as Will had later been introduced to him as, because of course the tattoo shop had promoted his latest piece against the wishes of their client) had more intel on, required a few alterations, most of which included advancements on the timeline that would force Alana to leave sooner than expected (and less methodically, leaving her weak and

helpless to reactionary decisions without questioning Will's involvement) and trap the FBI's convoy nearly an hour away from the hospital.

What neither side knew, the FBI and BSHCI or Dolarhyde, was that Will's curiosity of the carnage would not outweigh his overarching goal: rescuing Hannibal. He had isolated himself for three years, planned this night for most of the third, eagerly awaiting a beast such as Dolarhyde to rise from the ashes to create Will's window of opportunity. His desire to see Hannibal, to take back his words from years ago, remained solid despite the creeping sense of doubt that rattled in the back of his mind: *what if Hannibal hadn't wanted to see him? What if Hannibal achieved clarity for who Will once was, saw him unchanged and unable to equal him in every endeavor as before?*

Jack's report, upon spilling the beans of Will's delayed retirement, indicated that Hannibal was at least not opposed to the idea of seeing him. In fact, he had appeared overzealous in his desire to see him, to find out about his wellbeing, to rediscover the man of his past, but Will held his reservations regardless. His disguised calls to his lawyer, later revealed as Dolarhyde himself, entailed siccing the murderous man after Will in what Alana herself later simplified to a notion of wanting to "make sure his beau was okay." His half-hearted protests fell on deaf ears, though he knew the statement rang true. Hannibal and Will were past the point of destroying one another, had long since become another entity altogether, and any murderous intent toward him equaled a self-loathing or self-harming nature in Hannibal himself which was impossible: *"Suicide is the enemy,"* Hannibal had told him ages ago, back when their relationship teetered on the edge of encephalitis, paranoia and desperation.

Will had no one in his life these days, not even Jack or Alana despite their close involvement in the case, and he hadn't once entertained the idea that Hannibal's schemes would extend to employ a killer to slit his dogs' throats in the middle of the night, despite his distaste for their messy (slobber, ever-shedding fur, a child-like knack for drudging mud inside the house and onto their clothes) nature that never quite aligned with his own. No, the dogs were always a surety, and he had no one, save for Hannibal, as he always had and likely always would; if he had, he thought, Hannibal would've sent Dolarhyde after them instead.

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The day stumbled upon them sooner than most expected. Dolarhyde arrived at BSHCI earlier than even Will had predicted, though not so early that he complicated his plan, adding an

authentic air of improvisation and spontaneity to an otherwise well-choreographed dance Will had set into motion. More guards remained at the hospital than Will had intended, the last of the inmates shuttled off to neighboring facilities, but Dolarhyde made quick work of them with his silenced handgun and ridiculous mesh mask.

Will had to refrain from rolling his eyes yet again at the theater of the Great Red Dragon, taking the front steps of the hospital two at a time and fluidly overstepping the slumped bodies against the entryway. His methods, although efficient for Will's plan, seemed to ooze *Phantom of the Opera* levels of drama on occasion. Hannibal would appreciate it in a distracted sort of way, as a cat plays with a mouse before devouring it, and he attempted to wipe the budding smirk from his face at the thought.

*No use running into a loony bin looking like I belong inside it.*

His own sharpened knife and its cold wall of metal hugged the small of his back, handle butting into the notches of his spine as he followed the quickly accumulating host of dead bodyguards in the hallways. Over the obnoxiously loud blaring of alarms, he heard his phone from inside the breast pocket of his blazer, tucked away and buzzing incessantly: *Jack*.

Alana would be escaping by now, too frazzled to suspect foul play on Will's part, instead giving a demented murderer a wide berth and returning to the safety of her Verger family while she still could. Which murderer she feared the most, he hadn't a clue, as three strong contenders were housed under the same roof that evening. Alerting Jack of the events would be the extent of Alana's involvement. Powering his phone off before picking up his previous stride was simple enough. Now, if only he could slay the beast and spring Hannibal from his cage without any additional surprises.

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Will may have slightly miscalculated Dolaryhyde's disproportionate desires of idolization and destruction for Hannibal. He had assumed, based on the awe-sounding pitch of the dragon's baritone voice during their lawyer-patient calls, that he leaned more toward idolizing the legendary Chesapeake Ripper, but seeing the man attempt to shoot Hannibal

through the ~~airholes~~ ~~gloryholes~~ ~~ventilation holes~~ holes of his bulletproof cage like monkeys in a barrel sent his blood boiling.

*I guess he doesn't handle betrayal well.*

He didn't pause to consider a different method of attack, instead launching himself at Dolarhyde's back. He jumped up on the lumbering man, reaching his knife around to slice him from bellybutton to collarbone, dragging the knife up as far as he could before retracting the blade. At the same time, he bent his neck to the side, biting down on the soft flesh of his neck to rip skin and tissue from him with ravenous attention. Even the totality of his weight and fury, of nearly gutting him in front of Hannibal and devouring his neck, wasn't enough to incapacitate the taller man.

Dolarhyde cried out in pain, arms extending behind him to grab hold of Will's suit (which was a shame, considering it was tailored and never-worn, a slight nod to Hannibal's refined tastes that he knew the aforementioned would appreciate immensely) and held tight as he slammed them both, Will taking the brunt of the attack, back-first into the glass *once, twice, three* times. His head spun, seeing balls of flame ignite in the dark, and just barely managed to avoid landing on his head or neck and Dolarhyde let him go.

He pictured himself choking on his own blood, his neck snapped in two, before swiftly turning into a roll and regaining his footing. His mind recalled the delayed sensation and sound of his suit tearing as he was slammed backward and frowned at the idea that Hannibal didn't get to see his complete look before he made a mess.

He hadn't the opportunity to glance at Hannibal, but he could feel his gaze staring at him and through him, blinding him as the sun does with prolonged exposure, felt the heat of *something* distinctly Hannibal roving over every inch of his body at the sight of him. Strings of blood trickled down his stubble, a sharp contrast to his pearly white teeth, and he was sure he looked animalistic under the dim and clinical lighting of the hospital as he snarled in pleasure at the violence.

Hannibal's presence in the room was palpable and heavy, and it took everything in Will to resist the temptation of glancing his way. It had been three long years, no communication, and a lot of separation for the both of them. He didn't begrudge him the look, instead using the newfound tingle of excitement to launch himself into another attack at the dragon.

The wounded man had been yelling the entire time, breathing harsh and trying to overcome the pain and shock of being gutted without warning, clamping a big meaty hand against the neck wound to slow the bleeding. Will was able to dodge a hasty punch before plunging the knife deep into his lower abdomen, dragging the blade sideways this time. Flashes of his own wound, of the *smile* Hannibal had given him years back, momentarily flickered in the present, only just barely weaving around the butt of the handgun that was pointed for his temple.

He rolled away, knife lost in the dragon's stomach, and watched as gouts of blood sprayed out and around them. It was nearly over, he thought, watching as all five liters of blood in a body attempted to leave at once. Dolarhyde was dangerous, however, and he wouldn't go down without a final burst of numbed pain and rage, hopped up on adrenaline and his own murderous thoughts impeding his death. He pulled the knife out of himself, turned, and pointed the gun at Will's forehead.

Will's eyes opened painfully wide, his mind lapsing at the very real threat of a bullet that could move twenty times faster than a blade ever could, and he ducked to charge the man as he squeezed the trigger. He ran full sprint toward him, arms hugging his bloody middle as he successfully knocked them both to the ground this time. They were a scramble of limbs and slick blood, Dolarhyde landing a painfully true stab using Will's blade to his right pectoral as he in turn bent the dragon's gun-wielding wrist at an awkward angle, hearing the snap of bone as the gun fell to the floor.

His left leg kicked out frantically for the gun, kicking it far away against the front wall near the automatic doors, and a swift punch to the side of his head sent Will reeling backwards.

The floor slid beneath him as he careened back, the right side of his chest engulfed in flames and thick, throbbing waves of pain. It was hard for him to breathe, he realized, the knife plunging dangerously close to his lungs and leaving him coughing blood down the front of his white button-up.

His head thudded against the floor as he came to a stop. He braced himself, grimacing as he pulled his own knife from his chest, watching as blood began to soak his suit entirely and biting back the groan of pain as the numbness of shock had already begun to fly away. He turned his face to see Hannibal pressed against the glass and watching intently at the fight. To any layman, he would appear unaffected and alien to the battle before him. Will wasn't a layman, and he knew where to look. He saw the tight press of lips, the anxious tilt of his

head, the tension rolling over his entire body like electricity, and the unblinking stare boring into his own eyes that seemed to plead with him.

*This is Hannibal scared*, he wondered dumbly before rolling to avoid a swift kick to the ribs.

Dolarhyde picked him up by the lapels of his suit, blood raining down from both of them, shoving him *hard* into the glass wall where Hannibal stood. His head felt stuffy, full of cotton and stubborn blood clots, breath coming in short gasps like a dying man, and with all the strength he had left he bent his right foot up to meet his reaching left hand. Strapped to his ankle was a tiny blade, barely even worth calling a weapon and closer to a toothpick, but its unexpected presence threw Dolarhyde off long enough for Will the twist the blade into his grasp and force it into the thick carotid artery of his neck.

He slid, bloody and exhausted, down into a pile of bloody scraps of suit against the glass. No longer suspended or pressed against a hard surface, air flooded into his chest and then out just as fast, and he began coughing up blood in earnest as he attempted to keep a watchful eye on the dragon. Dolarhyde had staggered back, blood shooting from the puncture wound, letting out a final and desperate snarl before falling to the ground in a dead heap.

Will only had a moment to realize he'd killed the dragon, his lips twitching at the fairy tale fantasy, before a flood of red erupted from his throat and sent him doubled over as his body spasmed. The shock had passed, his brain unhelpfully supplied, and now the pain was truly kicking in.

He cried out, sucking in precious scraps of air as his red-stained hands attempted to clamp down on the deep hole of his breast. Hannibal was behind him, pressed against the glass and his back, he knew it without even looking, attempting to gain his focus with stern commands of *"Will! Look at me, Will. Focus on me."*

He ignored him, his bloodied watch reading 8:23pm; the FBI would be here sooner rather than later, and he couldn't bleed out on the floor of a mental hospital before he even had the chance reunite with the love of life.

*Holy shit.*

He had a concussion, surely, and his back hurt more than he felt was only temporary aches and pains, but even a direct punch to the head, full-body rattles, and several beatings couldn't account for the revelation. He'd longed for Hannibal for years, his misery at them parting less of a phantom limb and more of a phantom heart, but he hadn't the mental clarity that near-death experiences often provided to deduce that he was *in love with Hannibal.*

He always had been, and that had been the crux of his rejection. He felt he hadn't deserved Hannibal, for all the cruelty and loving affection they'd thrust upon one another, and he'd needed the time and space to accept that. He'd needed to accept that Hannibal had loved him back, too, in spite of his shortcomings, likely had from their first encounter because *holy fuck, he'd been rude to him in the beginning*, and *how was he not eaten alive before their first appointment?*

Speaking of the man, the good doctor was still behind him and getting downright frantic (or, his own blend of frantic)—apparently his little epiphany had only added to Hannibal's worry, leaving him desperate to either gain his attention or break out of the cage by force. He couldn't, however, and that was yet another bittersweet memory that resurfaced in his mind.

The alarms of the hospital were still yelling overhead, his skull throbbing at the sound, and he only stumbled once in dizziness as he arose from the ground. Early stages of his plan had accounted for the secret door of the cage, looking like just another panel of the wall, counting on either a key or override code to unlatch it when the alarms had sounded and lockdown precautions were in place, but he'd later discovered that no such code existed in the case of Hannibal. Alana had been more afraid of Hannibal's escape than anyone, he remembered from their briefings, and it had driven her to even unethical standards of imprisonment. Will had hounded her to admit it, his imagination painting the picture of a fire breaking out and Hannibal trapped to either suffocate or burn alive thanks to Alana's cowardice.

With a sigh and no little pain, he regained his footing and stood up, shaking the bitter memories from his mind. Hannibal was mirroring his every movement, watching with something dangerously close to awe overtaking his chiseled features, and Will tampered down every sensation of hope flooding his body to get to work.

He pulled a lighter out of his pocket. Hannibal's eyes caught sight of it as he flicked the cover off, the metal dulling under the copper smudges of his hand, and watched as Will bent over to grab his knife from the puddle of his blood—only a small squirt of blood shot out from his chest at the movement, which he considered a personal victory.

Will turned to face the man behind the glass, traces of Dolaryhyde's blood drying against his chin, his eyes overworking themselves to focus clearly through the concussion. Hannibal, for all his pomp and grace, looked more disheveled than Will had ever seen him. If it weren't for the pristine taupe jumpsuit he wore, he would swear the man had been in on the fight with him.

*"Will."*

His voice sounded wrecked beyond measure. His stomach flopped inside him, muscles tensing as the memory of his rejection brought a similar pitch to the older man's voice. His eyes struggled to focus on Hannibal's, his gaze making his heart race under the side of his chest that wasn't punctured, and his mind raced back to his plan: rescuing Hannibal.

*"Will. What—"*

Before he could continue, Will silenced him by dragging the sharp edge of the blade against the edges the glass, passing through each hole and drawing a straight line across the bridges between them before swiping his thumb over the lighter, sending flame to lick over each cut on the glass. It slowly unbonded the cells of the thick coating of "bulletproof material," as Katz had once called it, weakening its overall structure and durability. He'd worked FBI for a while, watched criminals even longer, and he'd recalled the trick from an older case when he was planning this night from his empty log cabin. If one was determined enough and had the resources, "bulletproof" meant nothing.

He was surprised at the utter silence from Hannibal, daring to dart his eyes up at the man that stood in front of him, solid as a statue. What he saw in his eyes eased every ache in his body, practically sent his own spilt blood back inside his body, reignited the fire inside his chest that has been extinguished with his own rejection.

Once he'd determined the flame had done its job, he closed the lid and searched the room with his eyes for anything to use as a blunt weapon. Seeing nothing, he stumbled from the room, ignoring the questioning voice of Hannibal as he searched the hallway for anything he could use. The first guard he found, no more than twenty feet away from the big doors of Hannibal's room, had a nightstick belted to his side. Will grabbed it, unblinking in the face of an innocent's death, and turned back toward the doors. He couldn't save them, wasn't sure if

he would've even if he'd deliberately planned to, but they had aided in him saving Hannibal, so he'd be as respectful as possible. Somewhere inside his head, the voice of Garret Jacob Hobbs and himself overlapped, whispering *honor them* in the quiet hallways of the hospital.

Shaking himself from the memory and the fresh wave of pain that settled over his chest, he found Hannibal staring at the doorway, awaiting his return. Something about seeing him, a dangerous force of violence and intelligence, helpless and dependent on Will, sent a hot flare of arousal to his tight and bloodied suit pants.

"You need to bandage your wound, Will. You're bleeding." Despite the chastising tone, Will caught the pleased twitch of his lips as he spoke.

He blinked slow at Hannibal.

"An astute observation, Doctor Lecter."

"Are we no longer on a first name basis?"

He shook the nightstick out to its full length, halfway to swinging it against the glass, before giving Hannibal a *look*.

Instead of answering him, he swung the stick perfectly against the cut and torched glass, watching with a satisfied smirk as it fractured for the first time that evening. His own skull and spine hadn't caused it to break, but a little attention and care was all it took to break down even the most impenetrable of fortresses.

He realized with a small and tender wonder that his inner voice had begun to sound like Hannibal somewhere across time.

Hannibal stood beside him, outside of the blast radius, predicting the end result of his efforts even as he stared unblinkingly at Will. On the final swing, the retractable nightstick broke from its hinges. He swore, ears picking up the tut from Hannibal's lips in response, uncaring

of how crude he was as he dropped the metal and stepped away, turned back just as quickly, and put all of his weight into his kick as he punched through the concave bend of glass for one final assault. A piercing pain, red hot lightning, shot up his Achilles and into his calf, the glass breaking apart and shattering a rough hole big enough for Hannibal to crouch through.

And crouch he did, swiftly standing up to turn all his attentions to Will and shirk him of the tattered remains of his jacket in a matter of seconds. Too stunned to fight back, Will allowed him his manhandling as the doctor ripped a rough bandage out of the fabric and wrapped it underneath his armpit, across the deep wound in his chest, and around his neck opposite before tying it in a firm knot. He grabbed Will's chin, brought it up from his chest, piercing into his eyes before using a caregiver's touch to push an eyelid up and check the dilation of his pupils.

*He's worried about me*.

If he was thinking straight, he would've said something, would've argued more or protested his possessive hold on him that extended to grabbing his hip. Instead he merely submitted to the affectionate worry and stared at the hard press of lips he'd fantasized about kissing for years before Hannibal caught his attention.

"I'm going to ask that you pay attention, Will. Are you listening?"

He nodded dumbly in response, the ache of the night and every night since Hannibal turned himself in seeping into his marrow.

Hannibal's face twitched in a way he couldn't understand. "Can you walk, Will?"

He immediately placed all his weight on his injured ankle, pain flaring up to the knee. He grimaced and gave a wobbly hand signal of doubt in response.

"Can you bear it for the next few minutes?"

He nodded back.

“How much time do we have?”

His watch read 8:40pm. His voice from the night he called Hannibal in warning, the night of the dinner party that went *so terribly wrong* rang inside his head: *they’re coming.* He was halfway decided on running away with him instead of turning him in, he remembered, but they hadn’t had the chance again until Will had royally fucked up, *again*.

“Will.”

He stuttered back to the present, the surreal experience of bleeding out in Hannibal’s arms while the taller man held him by the waist, an arm circling around his back to hold his head up by a fistful of hair, grounding him in the moment. A new version of their clock exercise, and more enjoyable for him despite the blood loss.

“Not long,” he let out with a shaky laugh.

Hannibal nodded and stepped closer, throwing Will’s left arm over his shoulder as they walked their way out of the hospital, the bloody puddle of Francis Dolarhyde resembling red wings splayed before them as they trudged through the mess. Hannibal was in his element, he knew, and Will blamed the extensive blood loss for his mind resorting to dirty thoughts. His mouth babbled before his brain could stop him.

“You look good.”

Hannibal’s profile was different with the haircut, the schoolboy charm of the longer, tousled hair gone and replaced with a more utilitarian style, shaved sides and a longer top, only accentuated with the jumpsuit. He was just as gorgeous and unique and terrifying as Will had remembered him, a blush rushing whatever remaining blood he had to his cheeks at the thought.

Hannibal only reacted minutely, blinking hard for a moment in his fluid motion, glancing back at Will from his peripheral sight, finding something more affectionate and revealing than he'd intended on Will's face, before continuing to shuffle them out of the building.

*Oh, God. He'll remember that for later.*

He could see him internally saving that comment, filing it into a specific folder in his mind that they'd revisit after he was no longer on death's door, and it was probably grossly unhealthy and alarming that he was more worried about that conversation than potentially dying. Some part of himself whispered that it was because Hannibal would never let him die, that he'd felt safe and right in his skin the moment he'd stepped foot inside his room, but he smothered it down with what little self-control he had left.

Before long they made their way to the parking lot, sans the expectant black FBI parade and flashing red and blue lights. Will resisted minutely when Hannibal attempted to direct them toward the street, pointing out the car he'd arrived in, and they hobbled their way to the passenger door instead. Hannibal dumped him gently into the seat, turning the AC vents his way and carefully adjusting the seatbelt over his chest, only stopping for a moment to smell him with his face firmly in place against his neck. His eyelashes fluttered closed, relaxing in the controlled embrace, and slipped out of existence in the wake of the escape.

He must've blacked out, from blood loss or exhaustion or some unknown third-but-equally-just source, as he awoke to the dark night sky staring back at him through the windshield. His mind absently wondered if Hannibal had done anything else to him while he was unconscious, but he quickly shushed those thoughts for later. It seemed they were tabling a lot of revelations for *later*, and Will questioned if he would survive his own embarrassment and Hannibal's passion whenever that day came.

The car softly rocked them down the road, an unknown destination locked inside Hannibal's head as he drove them into the night. Hannibal was at the wheel, his other unoccupied hand having taken up residence atop Will's thigh somewhere between the hospital and now, staring ahead with an eerie stillness.

The sweat that had covered his body, a direct result of the shock having worn off, had settled to a cool and remote stickiness against his bloody clothes. The air from the vents flittered off his battered face and through his curls, a refreshing breath of air after feeling choked to death on his own blood mere hours ago.

He opened his mouth to speak, unsure of what he wanted to say, knowing only that having Hannibal's name in his mouth was a necessity, but a nasty cough of leftover blood still lodged in his lungs jolted him forward in his seat, pulling against the seatbelt that tugged painfully over the frayed nerves of his chest.

A warm hand settled on his back between his shoulders, rubbing comforting circles as he let out the last dry heaves of pain, and settled back against the seat to make eye contact with Hannibal. He didn't look back, and Will almost slipped into doubt once again, before he watched, disconnected from his own body, as Hannibal reach for his hand and brought it to his lips. He dragged his mouth across the tips, down each digit and accompanying knuckle, breathing in the coppery tang of blood, and settling to rest soft kisses against his palm, all while keeping his eyes firmly planted on the road ahead.

He settled back down to himself, closed his eyes, and let the night swallow them both.

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When he awoke again, much later by his guess, as the soft early morning light filtered through simple white curtains and a big, boxy, modern window, he found himself in a gigantic and plush bed. He was under the covers, snuggled between the pillows and comforter, breathing slow and deep as his brain slowly began to turn on after his uninterrupted slumber.

He looked down at his bare chest, saw the elegant and precise stiches that covered his right pectoral where the knife had pierced him last night, and his mind flashed back to the events with whiplash-like speed. He breathed hard, blinking hard to regain his thoughts, and he felt the bed shift minutely beside him.

Turning his head, he caught a very much awake Hannibal staring at him from his upright position against the headboard. His heart clenched painfully in his chest, the predatory gaze he received taking him in with one long drag of eyes and swallowed around a dry throat to say something.

“Will.” He stopped, dragging his eyes back up to man’s face as it had begun flittering off to the ceiling, and waited.

“How do you feel?”

That was fair: a solid, definitive question he could answer as he took stock of his body spread over the soft sheets.

“Nearly whole. Like I wasn’t a pincushion for Francis Dolarhyde less than twelve hours ago.”

He expected Hannibal to let out a short breath through his nose, practically a guffaw for him, but he merely gazed at him with unnatural stillness before slowly sliding down the bed to lie stretched out beside him, weight pinned against the mattress with one elbow, his other hand reaching to cup Will’s cheek with surprising tenderness.

“I had worried you were lost to me for good.”

The sorrow in his voice was amplified as his voice gained a soft and drifting quality at the end.

“I’ve had worse. Hell, we’ve done worse to each other.”

“I meant that our time apart and lapse in connection left me bereft, harboring an intense longing for a person in a way I’ve never felt before, destitute and oddly doubtful of us ever meeting again. But yes, I had also feared your wounds were beyond my healing last night. It was by fate and circumstance that we made it here, alive and whole.”

Hannibal’s words had sailed through the air over Will’s face, kissing each sensitive patch of skin like sailboats boarding the port in welcome after a long and overwhelming trip. He

blinked his eyes, finding his lashes bunched together with dampness as the beginnings of tears began to swell unpermitted. The thumb of his hand abandoned its soft caress of his cheek, meeting the corner of his eye to softly pad away the wetness before it spilled down into the curly hair near his temples.

Hannibal leaned in, slow and cautious, as if he feared Will would bolt from their languid position at any subtle disturbance in the room, and pressed a soft kiss between his eyes, only pulling back enough for Will to refocus on him without going cross-eyed.

He breathed out, heavy and a little unstable, unaware he'd been holding his breath since somewhere near the beginning of the other man's monologue. He had no idea what to say to *any of that*, and *Jesus, why did he suck so much at this kind of thing*, and he scrambled internally for a response that wasn't completely off the mark.

Before he could respond, Hannibal leaned back in, torturously slower than last time, unblinking every inch of the way as he pressed his lips against his own. He breathed a strong gust of air in through his nose at that, shock overtaking him, and the strong line of the other man's body pressed in minutely to lean against his side, possessive and strangely sensitive despite their tumultuous track record.

He leaned in, pushing his lips up in welcome, before arching his back and immediately shrinking back down into the mattress as a wave of intense pain crested over his spine and up from his right ankle. There would be bruises, undoubtedly, and likely several knots of muscles, born from pure tension in his body from the attack, and he grimaced at the ugly picture his back surely sported.

Hannibal shushed him back into the mattress, petting his face and easing him down with his forearm across his chest, nuzzling his neck with his face in reward when he complied.

"I am unreasonably grateful to see you, Will." The hot pant of breath that curled over his neck and across his collarbone sent heat and a slight blush to his face. It'd likely only do him favors, guessing that his complexion looked closer to chalkboard or cadaver white than anything resembling a healthy flesh tone. Hannibal pressed a light kiss behind his ear, in the soft dip of skull and approaching hairline, gently sucking for a brief moment before retreating back to his top-down view of him.

He nearly shook, stuttering back. “I thought you’d never want to see me again, after what I’d said.” It was vague, short, and full of self-deprecation, but Hannibal understood him all the same.

“I don’t begrudge you your feelings at the time, dear Will. You were only responding in a way you deemed fit: an admirable attempt to gain a sense of stability in the chaos surrounding you.”

“It was idiotic, is what it was.”

Squinted eyes pierced through him to the back of his skull, reading every unspoken doubt and insecurity from years ago inside his mind.

“I would not wish to rewrite our past, as it has led us to this moment in time.”

God, he’d missed that overanalytical and carefully constructed way of speaking more than he cared to admit. Everything about Hannibal was entirely unique, unpredictable to him, and being so intimately close after so long had only jumpstarted his arousal for the other.

“I was too blind to see it, see you, back then. I had seen too much, felt too much, and I threw away something precious yet again.” When Hannibal neglected to respond, with words or expressions, he continued. “I was so overwhelmed, so sure that I wasn’t enough for you, that I shut you out at the worst possible moment. I followed you halfway across the world just to lose you in the sanctity of my own home.”

“Yet here we are, in a bed not dissimilar to that one, at an entirely opportune time for the both of us. How do you feel now, Will? Are you overcome still?”

“I… Yes, but that’s probably because you just kissed me more so than it is my own thoughts on us.”

“And I would do so again, if I wasn’t so entirely dependent on your thoughts and feelings.”

He swallowed the growing lump in his throat, praying Hannibal wouldn't look down to see the slight bulge in the sheets through the soft sweatpants he'd apparently changed him into while he was unconscious last night. A swipe of a broad thumb worked to release the tight pull of the skin on his brow, patiently waiting for him to speak when he was ready.

"I-I couldn't stand the thought of not seeing you again. I knew it would take someone like Dolarhyde to give me an opportunity to see you."

"Last I was aware, Alana had not restricted your visitations rights at the hospital."

*Ouch*. Even though he hadn't meant for it to hurt, Will still felt an edge of guilt pierce down against his heart.

"Yeah, well, I wasn't on great speaking terms with her, either. I didn't really… handle your imprisonment well. I knew if I saw you there, caged as you were, I would do something reckless before the time was right."

"Like take down an overcharged man with a knife and your teeth in front of me, ignoring me every step of the way?"

He recalled the blood that poured down his chin, how it dried against his stubble, and irrationally wondered if Hannibal had licked any of it away when he cleaned him up the night before—if any of it still lingered on his body, a delicious surprise for both of them in the morning.

"It was more planned out than it seems, I assure you."

"That it was."

The air was thick, their bodies heavy and real as Hannibal laid all his weight atop him, pushing him further down to rest his entire body in a possessive pose above him like a cat ready to devour. His lips were just out of reach, tantalizingly close, and Will nearly gave in and reached out before he spoke again.

“I read there was a mysterious figure terrorizing a small town in Vermont in recent years.”

His heart nearly stopped.

*He knew. Of course, he knew.* Where Will was concerned, Hannibal often knew more and sooner than even Will himself.

“I wouldn’t say terrorizing.”

“Fine; picking off their meager population at an alarming rate, with surprising acuity, zero incriminating evidence, and no ascertainable motive. Likely a loner, living by himself and well-versed in the art of taking a life. You wouldn’t happen to know anyone who fits into that profile, would you?”

“And who’s to say it wasn’t just lazy journalism on behalf of Vermont’s newspaper writers?”

“I say so. Because Jack mentioned it in passing to Alana, myself listening in, unbeknownst to either of them. He nearly roped me into it, but apparently the FBI thought better of it after a few desperate days passed by.”

*He—Jack. Jack had nearly asked Hannibal to assist in finding him. Him. His efforts hadn’t gone unnoticed after all.*

He’d known that he’d likely popped up on the FBI’s radar over the last few years, but he’d spread his kills out so far in time, location, design, and targets that local police departments had been unable to string any of them together into one conclusive culprit. Cross-county

department cooperation was spotty at best, hostile at worst, and Will had used that to his full advantage in his retirement.

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing after all. I'm sure you would've stirred the pot more than Jack would've liked, pissed off the FBI yet again, and wasted valuable government resources on a wild goose chase all in the spirit of curiosity and entertainment."

His eyes lit against the morning light, now approaching proper morning hours instead of the crack of dawn from earlier, and a full smile spread across his face.

"A good thing indeed. Being wasteful is just as sinful as being rude, wouldn't you agree, Will?"

He nodded, his heart settling calm and steady inside his battered chest once and for all, nestling against his chin until their lips hovered just above on another.

"And what would you like to do now?"

A heavy moment passed between them, cathartic in its own right, releasing the vestiges of their painful past behind them as they approached a new chapter in their lives. Will had a feeling this would be the first of many mornings on the reciprocating end of Hannibal's gentle prodding.

"Would it be rude of me to suggest at least an entire day in bed?"

Hannibal's mouth remained firmly in place, carefully neutral, but the wrinkles around his eyes tightened as an unquantifiable emotion heavier than any other pierced through him. A blanket of something safe, something *right*, slotted into place and settled over them both as they lazed in bed that morning. It felt permanent, something they couldn't shirk off even in their most reckless and sacrificing moments, reigniting the growing blaze between them that they stoked for years thereafter. They were unlike anyone or anything the world had ever known, free from the shackles of good and evil, painting their own fate in bright red and unbound by the laws of God and Man.

“Not at all, dear Will.”

As they settled down into the sheets, tangled in each other and all too aware of Will’s injuries, Hannibal breathed into his neck, smirk palpable in his tone.

“How fortunate for you, to rest beside someone that looks ‘*good*.’”

Will’s all-suffering groan echoed in the room, Hannibal’s rare chuckle joining in, until they became one sound in the early morning breeze.

End Notes

Okay, but like... is injured smut a must-have sequel or not? *side eyes my keyboard as I contemplate writing it anyway*

Let me know what you think in the comments, and thank you for reading this to the very end! <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!